

FINALLY, SLEEP FOR YOUR BABY



Sleep Problems - Helpful Tips for Your Baby and You

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Sleep needs

Did you know that newborn babies need 21 hours sleep a day and children from six months to two years of age need at least 12 hours sleep? Sleep deprivation can cause problems for

everyone in the family: fractious babies during the day, exhausted mothers and an anxious, stressful atmosphere.

Sleep deprivation

Sleep starvation is a huge problem for today's parents. A survey of 2,000 new parents and 2,000 people aged 55 to 65 was carried out by Mother and Baby and Yours magazines.

It found today's parents try all kinds of things to get their babies to sleep through the night, including taking the infant into their own bed. In contrast, parents in the 1960s and 1970s tended to say their babies had slept peacefully in their own cots.

Today's parents

New mothers of young babies reported that, on average, they only have three and a half hours sleep a night, compared to five hours which the older generation said they used to get.

Two thirds of those surveyed said this "sleep starvation" left them feeling bad-tempered, with the same proportion reporting irritation with their partner. Other problems included being tearful, forgetful, depressed, more accident prone or clumsy, unable to function properly, and irritable with their baby.

So what's different?

In the 60s and 70s roles tended to be more clear-cut. Fathers went to work and earned the money, mothers stayed at home and brought up the family.

Mothers today often feel they are expected to bring up the family and earn money doing something interesting. This situation can create anxiety: family members can often be living miles away from each other, so there's very little support for the parents.

30-40 years ago you probably had relatives living nearby who could help with babysitting and be there to offer advice - generally to calm the situation. I saw a lot of young families while running a homeopathic clinic in Bristol. They rarely had family support nearby. Here in Cornwall it is noticeable that there is more family support, possibly because this is primarily a rural area, strong in traditions.

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Vicious circle

Anxiety breeds anxiety. If you're feeling tense and anxious the chances are that your baby will pick up on this and react in a

similar way, so you get caught in a vicious circle. When other family members come home they pick up on it too.

Obviously when you're getting up several times a night to breast-feed you're going to feel very tired, but there is a great difference between being tired and tense and tired and relaxed.

The chances are that if you have periods of time when you can relax then your quality of sleep will improve. Your baby will pick up on this and learn to relax as well and your baby's quality of sleep will improve because of this.

Sometimes a baby can be irritable simply because he or she hasn't had enough sleep. When a young baby isn't sleeping at all well it can affect the whole family. Obviously with new born babies disruption is expected but when the problem persists, sometimes for years, the results can be devastating.

Benefits of good sleep

While your baby is sleeping his or her cells are being regenerated, so the quality and amount of sleep is very important in the development of your infant.

Often over-stimulated babies calm themselves by looking away, yawning or sucking on their lips - this self-relaxation increases their parasympathetic activity and reduces sympathetic nervous activity.

In plain English the parasympathetic nervous system chills us out and the sympathetic nervous system stresses us out.

The two systems work side by side to create a flow in the system. However, for example, through lack of sleep, this balance gets thrown out and your baby is more stressed out then muscles tense up and blood vessels are constricted.

In this culture, with all its inherent pressures, people's Sympathetic systems very often stay on guard, unable to give in to the softer, more gentle flows of the Parasympathetic system.

If we're used to being tense we might not even think it a problem if our baby is also tense - and, as with adults, a chronic state of tension leads to stress related symptoms and illness.

What can help?

Learning to relax for a start. There are many forms of relaxation. Yoga, meditation, tai chi, pilates - these are just a few choices. There may be classes nearby or you could watch a video at home to learn the right moves.

Start early

During pregnancy, especially the final trimester, there can be anxiety about the impending birth. Regular listening to relaxing music to help create a relaxed state during pregnancy can actually help during the birth itself. By the time your baby is born, your body will have learned to relax even more deeply to the music, as a conditioned response

Mothers-to-be are encouraged to play music to their unborn babies because research has shown babies can respond and be soothed by soft music both before and after birth.

According to Dr. Thomas Verny, author of 'The Secret Life of the Unborn Child' your baby can kick in time to music from 25 weeks. The right musical stimulation can enhance development, encourage sucking and promote weight gain in newborn babies as well as help them to be relaxed and calm.

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A relaxing day

Imagine the difference you could make to your life by getting into the habit of relaxing through activities like yoga, meditation or listening to calming music every day - especially if you set a regular time. It's worth it.

If you and your baby are more relaxed then sleep is going to be a lot easier. If your baby is spending his or her time in a relaxed and calm state during the later part of the day or around the time you would like him or her to start dropping off, it can only help.

We're the same - if we've just been dancing away at a party we're hardly likely to be in the mood to sleep straight afterwards - we'd be buzzing - so why should babies be any different?

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